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Richard Alan Ryerson. *The Revolution Is Now Begun: The Radical Committees of Philadelphia, 1765-1776.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978. xvii + 305 pp. Tables, figures, appendixes, a note on sources, bibliography, and index. $25.00.

Asserting that recent historians have been mainly concerned with the "why" of the Revolution, Richard Ryerson has attempted to explain "how" in Pennsylvania a movement of convervative constitutional protest became a real revolution, drastically reordering the source of political power, creating new institutions, and replacing old leaders with new ones. What was the mechanism by which the radicals cast off British control and subverted the authority of the assembly? Ryerson's answer: through the creation of a committee structure drawing its authority from sources outside the traditional political life of the colony. Eventually the committees became a government within a government equipped to mobilize the people into forcing policies of resistance and prepared to summon conventions based upon the sovereignty of the populace. When in 1776 the assembly endorsed resistance but procrastinated on independence, the structure of politics had already changed so drastically that the radicals could stage a bloodless coup d'etat, repudiate a form of government based upon the 1701 charter, and create a new constitution. The colony's assembly was overthrown because its members no longer represented the will of the constituents. Footdragging over independence became synonymous with treason, since conservative and moderate trepidation endangered the moral and physical welfare of the people striving to build a brave new world.

The Revolution Is Now Begun makes a most important contribution to our understanding of Pennsylvania's history through Ryerson's painstaking reconstruction of the membership of various committees dating from the Stamp Act through 1776. Pages of very clear charts furnish information on the wealth, occupation, religious affiliation and political opinions of delegates drawn principally from tax lists, church records, and contemporary observation. This careful reconstruction, which will become a basic source for future historians, provides for the first time reliable knowledge of the

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changing patterns of support for resisting Great Britain. Defining his terms precisely so that the words "radical" and "moderate" change meaning in each major confrontation, Ryerson correlates the declining economic status of committee members with growing radicalization. Successful mobilization of Philadelphia's population came through skilled political organization, largely led by Charles Thomson, Thomas Mifflin, Joseph Reed, and John Dickinson, who created tickets balanced by wealth, occupation, ethnicity, and religion.

Charts provide the data from which Ryerson derives his important conclusions. The inarticulate or downtrodden never played a significant role in the political leadership; however, power did gravitate downwards from the very wealthy to the "middling" or artisan and mechanic classes. Wealthy men dominated the resistance movement before the Tea Act, and up until 1776 young men from traditionally important families like Mifflin, Wharton, and Dickinson were key figures. Denominational affiliation is an unreliable predictor of commitment to resistance. Wealthy Anglicans and Quakers often opposed the developing revolution, but members who were less prosperous helped lead resistance. In Philadelphia Presbyterians did not dominate the committees, and the most common membership on the most radical committee was Anglican. The Revolution should not be viewed as a Presbyterian triumph over Anglicans and Quakers. Not until late 1775 do Quakers in good standing completely disappear from political organizations.

The biographical data are woven into the most detailed analysis of Philadelphia politics yet to appear. After the Stamp Act and Townshend Acts, nonimportation enjoyed widespread support and the committees which enforced the boycott were controlled by traditional leaders, mainly prominent importers, who were Quakers or Anglicans. The controversy over repeal of nonimportation following the repeal of all the taxes except on tea marked a decisive reorientation, for the mechanics or artisans who favored continued nonimportation were defeated by moderate and conservative merchants. Repudiating consensus politics, radicals and mechanics created a new political coalition capable of wresting control of the city by 1774.

No other account of the Revolution provides a comparable account as to how the leading issues of the day contributed to the undermining of the assembly's authority. In 1774 both the convention and the assembly nominated and instructed delegates to the first Continental Congress. Debates over the creation of a militia, compensation for soldiers, election of officers, treatment of pacifists, apportionment of representatives, and support of congresses created a situation where radical suspicions of the assembly multiplied. In the struggles between moderates, conservatives, and radicals between 1774 and 1776 politics was transformed. Previously, political

decisions were determined by a small, closed group of prominent wealthy merchants associated with either the proprietary or Quaker party who were generally Friends or Anglicans. Electors voted on the basis of the personal standing of a candidate, and issues played a negligible role. At the end of an election harmony prevailed, and the successful candidate was free to decide issues. Now contending slates of candidates became the norm, and voters presumed to dictate instructions for their representatives and supervise their performance. Traditionally silent groups like mechanics, Baptists, and Lutherans contributed nominees in slates drawn up to include all interests. Small groups still nominated tickets, but new men ran the political machines. The mobilization of the community to resist British oppression brought nearly 1000 new men into politics and created an era of bitterly partisan politics, prefiguring the coming age of mass participation. Between 1770 and 1776 Pennsylvania's latent or deferential politics became far more democratic. Ryerson argues that this transformation had already begun, but the Revolution speeded up the process in which the traditional Quaker party was overthrown by new elements more in tune with the emerging character of Pennsylvania society.

To be useful collective biographical data must be gathered with care. Ryerson's data on the religious origins of committeemen cause him to conclude that politics was pluralistic and that ticket balancing was the way to guarantee widespread popular support. Unfortunately, his religious identifications are sometimes suspect. To prove a continuing strong Quaker element in the assembly and on committees, Ryerson must assume that disownment played little role in the political activities of Friends. Religious fervor stopped at party lines, and a member read out of meetings for counterfeiting (Christopher Marshall), violating the peace testimony (Thomas Mifflin), or one who had never been a member but whose wife was (John Dickinson) had comparable influence to an elder (Henry Drinker) or clerk of the yearly meeting (James Pemberton) who withdrew from political activities. A numerical listing of Anglicans makes equal a vestryman like Michael Hillegas (also a leader of the Assembly) with a sailmaker holding no office in the church. Our knowledge of religious communities in Philadelphia, except of the Quakers, who may be exceptional because of certain sectarian attitudes, is pitiful. Stephanie Wolf's recent study of Germantown (*Urban Village: Community and Family in Germantown, Pennsylvania, 1683-1800* [1976]) concluded that religious and ethnic ties counted for little; on very little evidence Ryerson argues that in a larger, more cosmopolitan town five miles away such loyalties were crucial.

The charts depend upon several assumptions about wealth whose validity is not assessed. Ryerson assumes that tax lists are an adequate indication of

total wealth, at least in a comparative standard. Yet nowhere does he analyze how the tax lists were formed or if they included total wealth. If an artisan owned a farm in Chester County, would it be listed in the Philadelphia tax records? Did stock in trade count as taxable goods? Was there in Pennsylvania, as we know happened in Rhode Island, any attempt to change assessments for political purposes? Wills of Philadelphia are not too numerous, and often historians have difficulty obtaining access, but some attempt to evaluate the reliability of tax returns against other information should be attempted.

The quantitative evidence on individuals that Ryerson has assembled is not coupled with a penetrating insight into why individuals reacted as they did. Wisely eschewing psychological portraits of little known individuals, Ryerson has not even made full use of the materials at hand to explain the motivation of important figures. For example, the papers of the Pembertons, the Penns, and Elizabeth Sandwich Drinker's diary are mentioned in neither footnotes nor bibliography. Dissertations on such prominent leaders as George Clymer, John Reynell, Richard Peters, and William Allen are omitted. Arthur Mekeel's dissertation on Quakers and the Revolution, the standard work for many years, is nowhere cited. How can one explain such omissions? Perhaps because most of the overlooked are conservatives, and this book assumes the necessity and desirability of the Revolution. Actions to create resistance are "heroic," "great," and reflect "cool self-control," but actions against, labeled "foolhardy," "insulting," "ascerbic," and "distressing," destroy colonial unity, overlook oppression, and are against the current of history. More likely, neglected sources and topics indicate a very narrow view of what constitutes political history. Such selectivity would be defensible in a dissertation or a series of articles, but leads to an unbalanced book.

In this three-hundred-page book covering a ten-year period in a single colony and concentrating upon one town the following topics are barely mentioned: the social structure of Philadelphia, economic changes, relations with such other colonies as Virginia and Connecticut, the backcountry, events in neighboring colonies, and the ideology of the Revolution. Previous historians of the Revolution in Pennsylvania, such as Charles Lincoln, Robert L. Brunhouse, and David Hawke, found it necessary to deal with these topics in order to make political events intelligible. Recent books on close neighbors, Lawrence Gerlach's on New Jersey and Ronald Hoffman's on Maryland (neither mentioned in the bibliography), concentrate upon the mechanics of the Revolution but do not ignore larger events. Ryerson's book fails to supersede previous writings because his focus is too narrow. The Revolution in Pennsylvania was not simply a struggle between the assembly and committees in Philadelphia over the best way to maintain

liberty. The collective biographies and political analysis provide convincing evidence that the failure of the assembly to survive cannot be attributed solely to a conspiracy and that the new Pennsylvania government of 1776 was the culmination of actions taken over the past decade. *The Revolution Is Now Begun* shows the amount of knowledge obtainable by a political analysis based upon the investigation of individuals. Unfortunately, Ryerson's refusal to grapple with the social and intellectual history of Pennsylvania results in failure to provide a satisfying account of the distinctive pattern of the Revolution in this most important colony.

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